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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000523

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: NO CONFIDENCE MOTION - DOES THE OPPOSITION HAVE A STRATEGY?

REF: KL 516 - DEFECTIONS FROM BN ABOUT TO BEGIN?

Classified By: DCM David Shear, reasons 1.4 (b and d)

Summary

11. (C) There was much smoke but little fire on June 19 concerning the announcement the day before that a ruling coalition member party will introduce a parliamentary no-confidence motion on the Prime Minister. Sabah politicians have told us that the move was coordinated, but opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) leaders' public statements seemed out of step with expressions of support from Anwar Ibrahim and his PAS opposition coalition partners. While the Prime Minister and other BN leaders have spoken forcefully against the move, we doubt that UMNO has yet to devise a strategy for countering the move. The BN Supreme Council is meeting this afternoon to determine how to respond to the defection of the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) in the conspicuous absence of Deputy Prime Minister Najib, who is vacationing in the UK through this weekend. What happens on Monday, when SAPP president Yong said he would introduce the no-confidence motion, may come down to how parliament speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia, a Sabah native, interprets house rules on the introduction of such motions. End Summary.

Opposition Not Quite Fully Coordinated?

12. (C) BN component parties in Sabah appear to have been informed of the June 18 SAPP (Sabah Progressive Party) announcement. In a June 18 meeting with Pol chief, PKR Vice President and Sabah chief Jeffrey Kitingan acknowledged that PKR-SAPP meetings had taken place, and indicated that SAPP's action had been coordinated with the other component parties. UPKO Secretary General Wilfred Tangau said his party knew of the SAPP announcement in advance. In public, Anwar Ibrahim called SAPP's announcement a courageous move, indicated his own support for the no-confidence motion, and urged other parties to follow suit. PAS leader Nik Aziz supported the no-confidence motion and is also urging all BN component parties to leave UMNO and join the Pakatan. On the other hand, Penang Chief Minister and DAP Secretary General Lim Guan Eng has questioned the very notion of a no-confidence vote, wondering why SAPP had not simply left the coalition. This view was reflected by Sabah DAP chief Hiew King Cheu in a June 19 conversation with Pol chief. Hiew said the announcement by SAPP President Yong Teck Lee represented no coherent strategy but merely personal hubris. Meanwhile, the extent to which SAPP members support party president Yong Teck Lee's June 18 announcement remains unclear. Malaysiakini quoted SAPP deputy president Raymond Tan as stating that he was "confused and embarrassed" by the move.

Ruling Coalition Reactions -- Where's Najib?

13. (C) PM Abdullah maintained, without further elaboration, that Yong was defecting because his "personal greed" had not

been satisfied. The government-controlled New Straits Times denounced the SAPP shrilly, headlining its June 18 edition "Double Cross," portraying Yong Teck Lee as "uncouth" and "irresponsible." A raft of UMNO and BN leaders have separately denounced the move in public. BN component parties from Sarawak reportedly have expressed support for the PM, while two other BN component parties from Sabah, the UPKO and the PBS, have yet to declare themselves. As we draft this report, the BN Supreme Council is reportedly meeting in order to decide how to manage SAPP's betrayal. Absent from the meeting, and from Malaysia, is Deputy Prime Minister Najib, who remains in the UK on vacation and from whom we have yet to hear a reaction to yesterday's events.

Is There a Pakatan Strategy?

14. (C) PKR vice president Jeffrey Kitingan told Pol Chief on June 18 that Pakatan originally sought the no confidence vote during the first session of Parliament, planning to attach it to a major bill, but no such legislation came up. As a result opposition leaders now want to go straight to the no-confidence vote when Parliament resumes on June 23. According to Kitingan, the assumption is that there would then be a snap election, and the PKR is confident of doing even better than in March, especially with the economy. He said the goal was to change the government by December at the latest due to the worry that if Najib takes over "he will be another Mahathir," i.e., be more capable than the present PM.

It Could Be Up to the Speaker of the House

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15. (C) As reported reftel, Minister for the Parliament Nazri Aziz stated June 18 that the Parliamentary Standing Order required that motions of no-confidence could not possibly be tabled on June 23 because notice for all motions must be given in writing 14 days in advance. An "emergency motion" could be tabled with only two day notice, but this would require approval by BN-appointed Speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia. Parliamentary rules provide the Speaker with a great deal of flexibility, stipulating that he can reject an emergency motion request if it is not "specific, of public interest, and urgent." The Speaker recently rejected an opposition motion on the Burma relief issue on the basis that it failed to meet these criteria. On June 18 Pandikar indicated that he would make no decision until he actually saw a proposed motion, adding that he had received nothing as yet.

KEITH